

Community Impact Assessment: A Quick Reference for Transportation

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1. Introduction

Community Impact Assessment -- What is it?

Community impact assessment is a process to evaluate the effects of a transportation action on a community and its quality of life. The assessment process is an integral part of project planning and development that shapes the outcome of a project. Its information is used continuously to mold the project and provided documentation of the current and anticipated social environment of a geographic area with and without action. The assessment should include all items of importance to people, such as mobility, safety, employment effects, relocation, isolation, and other community issues.

Importance -- Why assess community impacts?

Transportation investments have major influences on society, with significant economic and social consequences. However, in many instances in the past, impacts on people have not received the attention they deserve. The community impact assessment process alerts affected communities and residents, as well as transportation decisionmakers, to the likely consequences of a project, and ensures that human values and concerns receive proper attention during project development. Specifically, community impact assessment for:

Quality of Life

A high-quality standard of living for all American means we must protect the essential elements of existence, including neighborhoods and community values. The assessment of community impacts supports sustainable, livable communities; promotes community values and thriving neighborhoods; and contributes to general well-being.

Responsive Decision-making

The assessment of community impacts helps ensure that transportation policies and investments embrace the concerns of neighborhoods, communities, and society as a whole. Understanding the relationship between transportation actions and community life leads to conflict minimization and the resolution of potential problems. Active involvement of affected parties leads to better decisions and greater acceptance of projects, while creating a sense of community ownership and enhancing agency credibility.

Coordination

Community impact assessment helps coordinate and integrate independent plans for land use, economics, and transportation to achieve common goals. This process helps communities meet State and local regulations and policies, such as zoning ordinances, environmental quality regulations, growth management and adequate facilities legislation, and comprehensive planning.

Nondiscrimination

Community impact assessment ensures that we act on our obligation to achieve environmental justice through practices and procedures that do not discriminate. It alerts decisionmakers to the effects on all segments of society and the potential for disproportionately high adverse effects on specific populations.

Legal Backing -- What are the legal requirements and guidances?

In addition to the practical reasons for community impact assessment, it is legally required and supported by major Federal regulations, statutes, policies, technical advisories and Executive Orders, including:

- Intermodal Surface Transportations Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA)
- National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA)
- Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and related statutes
- 23 USC 109(h), Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1970
- 23 CFR 771, Environmental Impact and Related Procedures (1987)
- TA 6640.8A (1987), Guidance for Preparing and Processing Environmental and Section 4(f) Documents
- Executive Order (EO) 12898 on Environmental Justice (1994) and proposed Department of Transportation Order on
- Environmental Justice (1996)
- Farmland Protection Policy Act (1981), as amended in 1994 (7 CFR 658)
- Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act (1970, referred to as the "Uniform Act,") as amended in 1987
- FHWA Environmental Policy Statements (1990 & 1994)
- Recommendations of the President's Council on Sustainable Development

FHWA's Environmental Policy Statement (1994)

It is FHWA's policy to:

Seek new partnerships with tribal governments, businesses, transportation and environmental interest groups, resource and regulatory agencies, affected neighborhoods, and the public.

Ensure that those historically underserved by the transportation system, including minority and low-income populations, are included in our outreach.

Actively involve our partners and all affected parties in an open, cooperative, and collaborative process, beginning at the earliest planning stages and continuing through project development, construction, and operation.

Community -- How is community defined?

There are many definitions of community. An analyst should consider several definitions, generally based on a geographic or spatial component.

Community is defined in part by behavior patterns which individuals or groups of individuals hold in common. These behavior patterns are expressed through daily social interactions, the use of local facilities, participation in local organizations, and involvement in activities that satisfy the population's economic and social needs. A community is also defined by shared perceptions or attitudes, typically expressed through individuals' identification with, commitment to, and attitude towards a particular identifiable area. In addition, there are other concepts of community which are not based on spatial relationships. Communities may be based on a common characteristic or interest, such as religion, ethnicity, income strata, or concern for the economic viability of a region, which provides a psychological unity among members.

Role -- How does community impact assessment fit into project development?

Community impact assessment is integral to the entire project development and decisionmaking process. For example, the assessment of community impacts, along with other relevant environmental impact studies, helps shape project decisions and outcomes under NEPA.

Within the NEPA process, the assessment serves a number of key roles:

- The assessment provides critical information about community values for the formulation of project objectives and the development of alternatives. This activity should start at the beginning of a study process, with community goals and concerns serving as major input to a project's purpose-and-need statement. As project alternatives are developed and subsequently refined or eliminated, there should be continuous informal communication between the project engineers, planners, and the community impact analyst so that options reflect community values to the extent possible.
- In the evaluation and selection of a preferred alternative, information from the community impact assessment should be considered at least equal to other related environmental studies in making sound project decisions. As decisions are made, the analyst should recommend techniques to deal with potential adverse impacts and assure that relevant changes within the community are brought to the team's attention.
- Finally, the assessment influences the NEPA "significant effects" determination on whether a Categorical Exclusion (CE), Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), or Environmental Assessment (EA) is appropriate. It provides needed information for the CE determination, EA, Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), draft EIS, final EIS, and Record Of Decision (ROD), and may be summarized or fully incorporated into these documents.

Throughout project decisionmaking activities and until construction, the community impact analyst assures that consequences to the social fabric of an area are given consideration with other environmental impacts. The analyst plays a vital role in the project development team as a vigorous advocate for community values.

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Executive Order 12898 on Environmental Justice apply to Federal activities. Appropriate implementation of Title VI and EO 12898 will be accomplished through implementation of the FHWA NEPA process. This process includes fully identifying social, economic, and environmental effects, considering alternatives, coordinating with agencies, involving the public, and utilizing a systematic interdisciplinary approach. Addressing the issues coupled with full implementation of 23 USC 109(h) (e.g., community cohesion, availability of public facilities and services, adverse employment effects, etc.) will prevent the potential for discrimination or disproportionately high and adverse impacts. Community impact assessment is key to this preventive approach.

The Assessment Process -- What is the process?

The assessment of community impacts rarely flows in a fixed, predictable series of steps. However, the analyst must be aware of basic logic behind the process in performing an assessment. The assessment process diagram depicts the fundamental tasks in the process, and previews the associated sections of this guidebook for reference.

The assessment process incorporates the following components:

Define the Project Study Area

In coordination with engineers, develop various project alternatives which satisfy the project purpose and need, and identify areas of potential impact ([Chapter 2](#)).

Develop a Community Profile

Determine the characteristics of the affected area, such as neighborhood boundaries, locations of residences and businesses, demographic information, economic data, social history of communities, and land use plans ([Chapter 3](#)).

The development of the profile is supported by the information collected from a variety of sources ([Chapter 4](#)).

Analyze Impacts

Examine the impacts to the community of the proposed action versus no action. Identify and investigate the consequences of the transportation action ([Chapter 5](#)).

A number of analysis tools can be used to examine these relationships and estimate impacts ([Chapter 6](#)).

Identify Solutions

Identify and recommend potential solutions to address adverse impacts. Techniques include avoidance, minimization, mitigation, and enhancement ([Chapter 7](#)).

Use Public Involvement

Use public participation as a basis to develop project alternatives, a source of information to develop the community profile, a tool to identify and evaluate impacts, and a method to identify acceptable ways to address impacts. Public involvement is an integral element of all the above steps ([Chapter 8](#)).

Document Findings

In addition to oral presentations, present the findings of the community impact assessment in written form for use by decisionmakers, to record findings, to disseminate to interested parties, and to support subsequent decisions ([Chapter 9](#)).

Iterative Process

Communities are dynamic and constantly changing. As options change, the analyst must make appropriate re-evaluations and adjustments in findings, particularly if there are substantial time lapses in project development.

Although the steps in the community impact assessment process are logically sequential, they overlap in practice. The assessment process is iterative in the sense that analysts must be prepared to revisit prior steps and be aware of future steps in conducting the assessment. In the early steps, when helping to frame the project and community profile, analysts must think about the probable relationships between the project and the community so that relevant data are collected. Later, if new impacts are identified or decisions are made, the analyst must go back to the community profile and gather additional information or data regarding populations affected.

2. Defining the Project

Project Identification -- What is the role of the community impact analyst in defining the project?

Community impact analysts should take a strong role in defining the project in the early phases of project development. Based on their understanding of community values and issues, analysts should take an active role in:

- Providing input into a project's purpose and need.
- Developing project alternatives.

Although transportation planners and engineers traditionally have controlled this process, community impact analysts should fully participate along with designers and other environmentalists. Analysts should contribute to developing project alternatives, suggesting new options based on preliminary indications of likely community issues and special areas to avoid. These alternatives come from a different perspective so they may be very different from those of transportation planners and engineers.

Study Area -- What is the scope of the geographic area to be examined?

Each technical analysis (i.e., air quality, traffic, and wetlands) may have its own individual study area. Community impact analysts should identify a geographic region which incorporates the communities expected to be affected by the project based on scoping, public involvement, and interagency coordination. This should include the project study area, and may extend beyond it.

The community impact study area typically includes communities within and immediately surrounding the project study area. In addition, analysts should recognize that the project might have social consequences to communities well beyond the immediate geographic area. As a result, the community study area may change as more information is collected and engineering variations are introduced.

Public Involvement provides important input to help define a project's study area, substantiate its purpose and need, and supply information for developing project alternatives that address identified needs.

3. Developing a Community Profile

The Community Profile -- What is a community profile?

The community profile is a summary of the history, present conditions, and anticipated future of an area. It provides an overview or series of snapshots of the area and is used as a basis for identifying potential impacts of a proposed transportation action. The profile is used to describe the "affected environment" in NEPA documentation.

Typically, the presentation includes the following:

A visual map or maps that depict physical characteristics, such as neighborhood boundaries, land uses, public facilities, and commercial centers.

Narrative text that describes community characteristics, such as population demographics, economic and social history of the communities, the importance of various facilities, and plans for the future.

Tables or graphics that summarize important data or conclusions, such as population demographics or employment trends.

Community Identification -- How do you identify communities?

The boundaries of a community can often be delineated by physical barriers, land-use patterns, political or area of responsibility divisions (e.g., school districts and police precincts), selected demographic

characteristics, and resident perceptions. A good starting place for defining communities for the project is the already-defined neighborhoods which are typically recognized by name and/or tradition.

The analyst should be aware of other boundaries and consider impacts based on those boundaries (e.g., school districts and project impacts on student populations; and fire districts and project impacts on response times). Subcommunities should also be identified, as well as stratifications within a community, based on economic or demographic characteristics.

How to Profile a Community

- Define community boundaries, and neighborhood or subdivision boundaries.
- Locate the businesses, residences, and activity centers of potential impact, especially within neighborhoods along the highway alternatives and near interchanges.
- Determine demographic characteristics, economic base, location of community facilities, and other characteristics.
- Learn about a community within the study area by comparing local or area population demographics, land-use, and other characteristics with State or regional information.
- Continually refine the profile throughout the assessment process as impacts are identified and as situations change over time.

Community Characteristics

The following are examples of the types of data to collect and incorporate into a community profile.

Population and Demographic Characteristics

- Trends in population growth and demographics
- Ethnicity and race
- Age and gender distributions
- Income levels
- Educational attainment
- Employment status
- Special population subgroups, such as disable persons
- Indian tribal governments, as appropriate

Economic and Social History/Characteristics

- Community historical background and context
- Community values and issues (e.g., security and solitude)
- Economic base (e.g., agriculture, manufacturing, and service)
- Property values
- Tax base
- Other economic characteristics (e.g., port city, tourism base, and lumber town)

Physical Characteristics Relating to Community Activities

- Community centers/activity centers
- Infrastructure (e.g., roads, transit, and water and sewage systems)
- Public services and facilities (e.g., schools, police, fire, libraries, and hospitals)
- Land-use plans and zoning
- Special areas, historic districts, and parklands
- Businesses
- Housing (availability, age, and type)
- Planned and approved future development
- Community focal points or informal meeting places (e.g., places of worship, playgrounds, hair salons, and laundromats)

Initially, information collection involves gathering general information. As potential impacts are identified later in the process, analysts collect additional data on the community that is targeted to specific needs. The following section of this guidebook describes the process for collecting data and identifies some key information sources.

4. Collecting Data

Gathering Information -- What should be considered when collecting data about a community?

Gathering data can be expensive and time consuming. Analysts should identify what data are needed for their specific purpose and are readily available. In many cases, in-house staff has expertise; and in larger communities, various planning agencies and councils of government have information that can easily be obtained. Another source may be other projects' files or earlier attempts at the current project, which may then be updated. If information is not available from traditional sources, analysts must be resourceful in seeking out alternative sources.

When collecting information, it is important to recognize when data were collected, the data sources used, and data reliability. Analysts should use the most up-to-date data available, understand the basic assumptions used in each compilation, and recognize the purposes for which data were originally collected.

Sources of Information -- Where can data be found?

The following are examples of data sources and their typical uses. (Refer to Section 3 for the types of information typically included in the profile.) Other sources may be available, so analysts should not limit themselves to these items.

Public involvement can serve as a source of information to identify community values and needs, to explore the importance of community facilities and resources, to identify those facilities not previously noted, and to validate information collected from other sources.

What are some data sources?

Contact Points

Source	Primary Uses
Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs)	Economic base, land-use and zoning plans, and area planning history
State and local government planning and social service departments/agencies	Economic base, land-use and zoning plans, taxing districts, social and economic programs, and business and marketing information
State employment agencies or labor departments	Employment trends, unemployment rates, and economic base
State, local, and university libraries (for local newspaper clippings and other local sources)	General information, community historical background, economic base, and business and marketing information
Local historical societies and State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO)	Community historical background, and location of historic structures, landmarks, and districts
Other relevant data collection organizations, such as Chambers of Commerce, religious institutions, American Automobile Association (AAA), Meals-on-Wheels, American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), social agencies, and other associations.	Special populations and needs, businesses, community issues, etc.

What data should be requested?

Data Collections and Activities	
Primary Uses	
Census Bureau publications and statistical abstracts	Population trends and demographics, economic indicators, and housing
Aerial maps and road maps	Community boundaries and physical characteristics; location of activity centers, infrastructure, houses and businesses
Field or windshield surveys and reviews	Locations and numbers of structures, and activity patterns
Yellow Pages or city directories	Businesses and community facility locations and type
Dun and Bradstreet (D&B) databases	Business location, type, and number of employees
Donnelley Directory (available on CD-ROM)	Business location, type, and number of employees
Tax records	Property values
Building-permit records	Approved or built development
Real estate market surveys, regional real estate journals, and interviews with realtors	Housing prices, trends in sales, age or characteristics of structures, and neighborhood compositions
Interviews and public involvement with businesses, community leaders, and residents	Community values and issues

How should information be gathered on households, populations and demographics?

Developing Part of a Profile

After identifying community boundaries, the analyst often begins the community profile by describing basic population and demographic characteristics. In order to gather this information, the analyst might:

- Consult the MPO, city/county, or statewide planning offices.
- Examine statistical abstracts and publications from the U.S. Census Bureau.
- Update demographic statistics based on projected growth rates.
- Conduct a field survey to pinpoint specific neighborhoods, residential subdivisions, and properties, and to identify new residential developments.
- Consult with schools, social service agencies, or community organizations to obtain more of school-age children in specific neighborhoods, households receiving public assistance, and residents with membership in religious institutions.

Early in the process, the analyst should collect general data that is necessary to describe the study or neighborhoods are identified, the analyst should collect specific, targeted data.

5. Analyzing Community Impacts

Guidelines -- What should be considered when analyzing community impacts?

After the transportation alternatives and a preliminary community profile have been defined, the analyst examines the relationship between the proposed transportation action and community life. This task involves both the identification and investigation of impacts. Analysts examine the anticipated future with the transportation action in comparison to the anticipated future without the transportation action (a no-build alternative or baseline). When analyzing impacts, it is important to keep in mind the following guideline:

- Be cognizant of both positive and negative impacts.
- Consider both temporary and long-term impacts as well as secondary and cumulative effects.
- Keep community goals in mind when identifying impacts.
- Recognize the public's perception of impacts. If the public identifies issues, then review and research these particular issues.
- Focus on the magnitude of an issue of controversy, as it determines the level of specificity the analyst must adopt.

Types of Impacts -- What are some of the impacts to be assessed?

The following table includes examples of the types of impacts that might be identified and analyzed. The inquiries under the impact categories highlight some of the relevant questions to answer to understand how the proposed action affects the community. This is an iterative process. Analysts will need to return to the community profile to obtain detailed information about the proposed project and to collect additional data about the community in order to answer the questions posed. The questions in this table should lead to others based on the specific circumstances of the project.

What questions help identify community impacts?

Impact Category		
Social and Psychological Aspects	Physical Aspects	Visual Environment
<p>Changes in Population Will the project cause redistribution of the populations or an influx or loss of population?</p> <p>Community Cohesion and Interaction How will the project affect interaction among persons and groups? How will it change social relationships and patterns?</p> <p>Isolation Will certain people be separated or set apart from others?</p> <p>Social Values Will the project cause a change in social values?</p> <p>Quality of Life What is the perceived impact on quality of life?</p>	<p>Barrier Effect Is a wall or barrier effect created (such as from noise walls or fencing)?</p> <p>Sounds Will noise or vibration increase?</p> <p>Other Physical Intrusions Will dust or odor increase? Will there be a shadowing effect on property?</p>	<p>Aesthetics Will the community's aesthetic character be changed?</p> <p>Compatibility with Plans Is the project compatible with community goals? Has aesthetics surfaced as a community concern?</p>
Land Use	Economic Conditions	Mobility and Access
<p>Land-Use Patterns Will there be loss of farmland? Does it open new areas for development? Will it induce changes in land use and density? What changes might be expected?</p> <p>Compatibility with Plans Is the project consistent with local land use plans and zoning?</p>	<p>Business and Employment Impacts Will the proposed action encourage businesses to move to the area, relocate to other locations within the area, close, or move outside the area?</p> <p>Short-term Impacts How is the local economy affected by construction activities? Are there both positive (jobs generated) and negative (detours and loss of access) impacts?</p> <p>Business Visibility Will the proposed action alter business visibility to traffic-based businesses? How will visibility and access changes alter business activity?</p> <p>Tax Base What is the effect on the tax base (from taxable property removed from base, changes in property values, changes in business activity)?</p> <p>Property Values What is the likely effect on property values caused by relocations or change in land use?</p>	<p>Pedestrian and Bicycle Access How does the project affect non-motorist access to businesses, public services, schools, and other facilities? Does the project impede or enhance access between residences and community facilities and businesses? Does it shift traffic?</p> <p>Public Transportation How does the project affect access to public transportation?</p> <p>Vehicular Access How does the project affect short- and long-term vehicular access to businesses, public services, and other facilities? Does it affect parking availability?</p>

Impact Category (Continued)		
Provision of Public Services	Safety	Displacement
<p>Use of Public Facilities Will the proposed action lead to or help alleviate overcrowding of public facilities (i.e., schools and recreation facilities)?</p> <p>Displacement of Public Facilities Will the project result in relocation or displacement of public facilities or community centers (e.g., places of worship)?</p>	<p>Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Will the proposed action increase or decrease the likelihood of accidents for non-motorists?</p> <p>Crime Will the proposed action increase or decrease crime?</p> <p>Emergency Response Will there be changes in emergency response time (fire, police, and emergency medical)?</p>	<p>Effect on Neighborhoods What are the effects on the neighborhood from which people move and into which people are related?</p> <p>Residential Displacements How many residences will be displaced? What type(s)-- multi-unit homes, single family, rural residential, others? Are there residents with special needs (disabled, minority, elderly residents)?</p> <p>Business and Farm Displacement How many businesses and farms will be displaced? What type(s)? Do they have unique characteristics, such as specialty products or a unique customer base?</p> <p>Relocation Sites Are there available sites to accommodate those displaced?</p>

Environmental Justice (TITLE VI/ NEPA)

Crosscutting all these issues is the concern for nondiscrimination. Analysts should identify who is adversely affected by the project, noting impacts on specific subgroups. The NEPA process and this guide should be used to address environmental justice issues and prevent the potential for discrimination and disproportionately high and adverse effects on specific populations.

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and related statutes assure that individuals are not excluded from participation in, denied the benefit of, or subjected to discrimination on the basis of:

Race	Age
Color	Sex
National Origin	Disability
	Religion

Executive Order 12898 on Environmental Justice directs that programs, policies and activities not have a disproportionately high and adverse human health and environmental effect on minority and low-income populations.

Relationships Among Impacts -- How do these effects relate to each other?

It is important for analysts to recognize the interconnections between community impacts. Analysts should not limit themselves to the previous list of questions. Instead, they should examine how differing impacts relate to each other, noting direct and indirect impacts as well as the cumulative or counterbalancing impacts of various effects.

Indirect impacts are those caused by direct impacts, and often occur later in time or further away in distance than direct project impacts. Cumulative impacts result from the incremental impacts of an action added to other past, present, or reasonably foreseeable future actions.

6. Selecting Analysis Tools

Basic Approaches -- What approaches might be used?

A number of approaches are available to identify and investigate project impacts. The following are basic frameworks that analysts might consider:

Comprehensive approach--gain as much relevant data as possible, examine, and then research a conclusion.

Incremental approach--build on information a bit at a time until you reach a conclusion.

Comparative approach--identify similarities and differences from past experience.

In all case, the process of examining relationships between a proposed action and a community involves making projections about *the future with the project* in comparison to *the future without the project*.

Analytical Aspects -- What dimensions should be analyzed?

When analyzing specific impacts, the analyst should broadly examine:

- Likelihood of impact
- Scale, severity, and extent of impact
- Duration of impact over time
- Reversibility of impact
- Direct and indirect (secondary) impacts
- Cumulative or counterbalancing impacts

Techniques -- What are tools that work?

There are a variety of techniques available to examine the effects of a project on a community. The following is a sample of relevant techniques or tools:

Statistical Analysis--forecasting, trendline projections, and correlation

Comparisons--case studies of similar transportation actions in other locations, using analogies, and examining similarities and differences over time or across areas

Visual Imaging--Computer simulations and development of physical models

Mapping Overlays--plotting various maps (physical characteristics, demographics, and project alternatives) and superimposing them to create a composite image

Expert Consultation--roundtables, discussions, and reports

Peer Review--consultation with professionals within the transportation field

Brainstorming--generating ideas through quick-response reactions

Delphi Techniques--structured form of reaching consensus among experts for problemsolving

Market Research--focus groups, targeted surveys, interviews, and questionnaires

Public Meetings--workshops and citizen advisory groups

Public Involvement can help the analyst identify potential impacts of concern to the community, and determine their severity, extent and importance. Several of the above techniques involve public participation.

Sample Techniques to Determine the extent of an Access Problem

If a potential barrier is identified, the magnitude of the problem might be assessed through several techniques.

- Use of overlays to superimpose maps of the proposed project, community facilities (e.g., schools), businesses, and the location of patrons. This approach will identify where the project might cut off a pedestrian/bicycle access route and helps determine the number of households where access is restricted.
- Use market research to identify how dependant the users are on current patterns of access (whether alternative services are accessible, whether individuals rely on walking/public transit, etc.).
- Perform comparisons with other areas that have experienced similar road development.
- Use public involvement to identify the degree of public concern and perceptions of barriers within the community.

7. Identifying Solutions

Addressing Impacts -- How can adverse impacts be addressed?

When adverse impacts are identified, analysts should identify potential methods to address them. This step in the community impact assessment process involves problem-solving and generating solutions. There are four primary methods for dealing with impacts, which should be considered in order. The thought-process involves the following steps as seen in the graphic on the left.

Project design options are typically based on an ideal engineering standard. When adverse community impacts are identified, analysts should:

- Work with the project development team to identify design or engineering options to deal with these impacts--starting with avoidance, and then moving on to minimization and mitigation techniques.
- Finally, consider enhancement opportunities which are a reasonable expenditure of public funds and help the project fit harmoniously into the community.

Community impact analysts should recognize that an effort to address one impact may create other adverse impacts. They should consider the potential impacts of these measures on the community, making sure that approaches support the purpose and need of the project. Whatever approach is selected, it is important to monitor and follow through on commitments.

Avoidance

After the project so an impact does not occur.

Minimization

Modify the project to reduce the severity of an impact.

Mitigation

Undertake an action to alleviate or offset an impact or to replace an appropriated resource.

Enhancement

Add a desirable or attractive feature to the project to make it fit more harmoniously into the community. (Not designed to replace lost resources or alleviate impacts caused by the project.)

Commitment must be included in Categorical Exclusion (CE), Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), and Record of Decision (ROD) documents as well as the draft and final EIS.

Public Involvement is an important input to help identify acceptable solutions to address adverse impacts.

Examples -- What are some examples of specific techniques to address impact?

Avoidance

Change an alignment so that there are not displacements.

Redesign a road segment as an underpass to avoid cutting off access to a community facility.

Minimization

Reroute or shift a highway segment to reduce displacements.

Limit interchanges to minimize incompatible land-use development.

Phase the project to minimize impedance to business access during peak periods.

Alter an alignment to increase the distance between the facilities and residences to minimize noise impacts.

Mitigation

Set aside land for a park or add to public recreation areas to replace lost facilities.

Erect sound barriers to mitigate noise to surrounding communities.

Provide a bicycle/pedestrian overpass or underpass to provide access to public facilities.

Provide compensation for properties acquired (a mandatory measure under the Uniform Act Amendments).

Enhancement

Provide signage to recognize specific cultural or historic resources.

Development bicycle trails or path adjacent to roadways.

Plant trees and add park benches.

Add public artwork or a facade to a transportation facility to match the aesthetic design goals of a community.

Two Types of Enhancements

The analyst should recognize to distinction between:

- **Environmental Enhancements**, which may be added to a transportation project to improve community acceptance (see 1990 FHWA Environmental Policy Statement).
- **Transportation Enhancements**, which are funded through a provision of ISTEA with funds set aside from the Surface Transportation Program.

Environmental Enhancements are incorporated into a project as part of routine decisionmaking to make it more compatible with and sensitive to community needs. Transportation Enhancements funding may be available to help meet these needs.

Potential Methods to Deal with a Barrier Effect

Examine what can be done to avoid creating the barrier. Can the alignment be changed to skirt the community rather than sever it?

If not, examine what can be done to minimize the barrier effect. Can an intersection and crosswalk be developed lessen barriers to interaction?

If not, what can be done to mitigate the impact. Can a pedestrian overpass be constructed? If access to a community center is impeded, can a new facility be constructed that is accessible?

For each of these steps, if an action is identified to address the barrier, examine what impact the action may have on the whole community. How would an overpass affect the safety and security of those using it? Select the mitigation measure that most adequately deals with concerns about crime; perhaps add lighting or design it with wide sight lines.

Examine opportunities for enhancement.

8. Using Public Involvement

Role of the Public -- What part does the public play in a community impact assessment?

Public involvement is not intended to be a separate task in the community impact assessment process but rather fully integrated within planning and project development. Analysts should identify and work with the person responsible for public involvement for each project so that community input is timely, coordinated, and customized to minimize the burden on the public.

As is clear from the preceding sections, public involvement is integral to the impact assessment process. The public can provide information for, and assist in validating, each of the following activities:

- Development of the project's purpose-and-need statement and identification of alternatives.
- Development of the community profile.
- Identification and investigation of transportation impact to the community.
- Identification of avoidance, minimization, mitigation, and enhancement opportunities.

Public involvement results in better assessments and project decisions that reflect community values. In addition, it enhances the credibility of the assessment process and its outcomes.

Principles -- What are guidelines for effective public involvement?

The planning and project development process must provide for an open exchange of information and ideas among the public, community impact analysts, and the entire project-development team. It should provide opportunities for early and continuing communication between the community and key project staff.

Notification -- What practices best encourage public participation?

Notification of activities is important and because it lets the public know about proposed actions and that their input is valued. Project staff can facilitate public participation by adhering to the following guidelines:

- Provide clear information and timely public notice.
- Schedule public meetings or activities that are convenient to the public; such as immediately before or after the workday at a site within the business district, or in the evening at a community center or school within a neighborhood.
- Reach out to the public rather than have them come to you.
- Use nontraditional and informal public involvement notification methods, taking special note to reach traditionally underserved populations.
- Avoid technical jargon and rephrase issues to encourage participation.
- Contact key stakeholders and community leaders (formal and informal) who can help notify the public.

Ways to Notify the Public of Meetings

Make an announcement at the start of town meetings, religious services, and community venter events.

Place posters at local businesses and gathering places, such as hair salons and grocery stores.

Distribute flieres at schools and on windshields of cars at shopping centers and public parking facilities.

Use community media, such as local news-papers, radio, local public-access television, and public-service announcements to reach residents.

Communication -- What are keys to effective dialogue?

In order to facilitate effective communication, the community impact analyst and other members of the project-development team should remember the following keys to promote open dialogue.

Ways to Promote Open Dialogue

- Provide a non threatening, open atmosphere.
- Be responsive and honest.
- Be prepared. Know the project, its status, and key contacts. Practice your presentation.
- Use stand-alone, nontechnical handouts with maps and other visuals that communicate information clearly.
- Make special efforts to be sensitive to the cultures and etiquette of the affected populations. A local liaison can be helpful to facilitate communication and provide guidance on etiquette. Staff training in interpersonal skills may be beneficial. In non-English-speaking communities, consider multi-lingual presentations and handouts, as appropriate.
- Be polite and treat people fairly

Techniques -- What are methods that work?

Over 100 public involvement techniques are available. Practitioners should employ a variety of methods throughout project development rather than rely on only one, such as the public hearing. In addition, practitioners should consider that informal techniques generally work best (e.g., small informal meetings rather than large formal ones, and selection of comfortable meeting places familiar to the community). If necessary, nontraditional approaches should be used to ensure the involvement of all parties, including the traditionally underserved (e.g., persons with disabilities, and low-income and Native American populations). Refer to FHWA/FTA's publication, *Public Involvement techniques for Transportation Decisionmaking*, for more information.

Sample of Commonly-Used Practices

- Public Meetings
- Newsletters
- Workshops
- Focus groups
- Advisory committees, ad hoc task forces, citizen work groups
- Community events (e.g., fairs, block parties, and festivals)
- Opening a field office near the project site or a mobile trailer along an affected route
- Questionnaires and surveys
- Personal contact, displays, and presentations at community activity centers, such as shopping centers

9. Documenting Findings

Application of Findings -- How are they used?

The findings of a community impact assessment are valuable for decisionmaking throughout the project planning and development process. Thus, the "findings" are not merely something produced at the end of the assessment. Findings start off general in nature, with the community profile providing hints to impacts, they may shift and get more specific as more detailed information is gathered and impact studies force changes in the proposed project. Because of the dynamic nature of communities and changing status of the project, the results of a community impact assessment are continually subject to change.

Once the number of project alternatives is narrowed, the community impact assessment details are formally documented and the findings are presented at public hearings.

Documentation of Findings -- How are findings formally documented

The written findings are prepared for inclusion, or summarized and referenced, in the NEPA document--the Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). This community impact material involves a factual presentation of information and potential impacts for each alternative and provides conclusions about methods to address adverse impacts as well as any proposed enhancements.

In addition, a community impact technical report may be produced as a stand-alone document if the complexity of the project, State procedures, severity of the impacts, or the quality of data justify a specialized technical report. Information from such a technical report referenced in the NEPA document. If scoping indicates that a community impact technical report is not needed, the analyst may move directly into preparing brief text sections on pertinent community topics, to be inserted directly into the NEPA document.

Because the community impact technical report and NEPA documents are made available to the public, they should be clear and understandable. This information must be an integral part of the public involvement and public hearing process.

Generating a Written Document -- When does writing begin?

Documentation begins early and takes place throughout the assessment process. Written findings should be recorded throughout project planning and development while the analyst develops and reevaluates the community profile, assesses and reassesses impacts, and identifies solutions for adverse impacts for each alternative. Preparing an outline of the technical report or NEPA document sections will help facilitate the writing process and identify data needs during the assessment process.

The Technical Report -- How should the community impact technical report be presented

Since environmental documents are usually prepared to comply with NEPA, it is prudent to use a compatible format for the community impact technical report, as reflected in FHWA guidelines (TA 6640.8A). In addition, there may be State or local requirements.

Within an EIS, community impact assessment information would primarily appear in the following sections, but may appear elsewhere as well:

- Affected Environment (Community Profile).

- Environmental Consequences and Mitigation.

In addition, other presentation guidelines include:

- Begin the report with an executive summary.
- Discuss only topics relevant to the project. However, topics identified in 23 USC 109(h) should be addressed, lest it be assumed they were not examined.
- Include a summary of public involvement activities (number of meetings held, continuing efforts, substantive comments).
- Present findings in a clear, nontechnical manner, using graphics to aid understanding.
- Use an objective tone in the report. Be aware that it is a public document. Describe the community in a professional manner, avoiding the use of descriptions and terms that suggest a bias or might offend readers.
- Reach conclusions on each topic discussed. Document concerns, alternative strategies, and commitments.

23 USC 109(h) lists the types of adverse social and economic impacts that must be investigated and documented

Noise

Destruction or disruption of man-made resources, aesthetic values, community cohesion, and availability of public facilities and services

Employment effects

Tax and property value losses

Displacement of people, businesses, and farms

Disruption of desirable community and regional growth

10. Resources

People -- Who can provide more information?

For additional information about the assessment of community impacts of proposed transportation projects, State transportation analysts are encouraged to seek out other internal and external specialists within their governmental unit. In addition, the Federal Highway Administration can provide guidance, through the following contacts:

- FHWA Division Environmental Coordinator.
- FHWA Regional Office Environmental Coordinator.
- FHWA Headquarters, Office of Environment and Planning, Environmental Operations Division.

A list of State Departments of Transportation (DOT) community impact specialists is available from FHWA, Office of Environment and Planning, if peer input is desired.

Publications -- What are some published sources that provide more information?

A number of publications are available as references for community impact assessment, in addition to the requirements listed in [Chapter 1](#). These publications include, but are not limited to, the following:

AASHTO. *Guidelines on Citizen Participation in Transportation Planning*. 1978.

Interorganizational Committee on Guidelines and Principles. "Guidelines and Principles for Social Impact Assessment." *Impact Assessment*. Vol. 12, No. 2, Summer 1994 pp. 107-151

Methodology of Social Impact Assessment. Community Development Series, Vol. 32. Edited by Kurt Finsterbusch and C.P. Wolf. Dowden, Hutchinson & Ross, Inc., 1977.

N.C.I. Research, *Understanding Your Economy: Using Analysis to Guide Local Strategic Planning*. Prepared for the U.S. Economic Development Administration, September 1991, 162 pages.

Salant, Priscilla. *A Community Researcher's Guide to Rural Data*. Island Press, 1990, 93 pages.

U.S. Department of Transportation, FHWA. *Environmental Policy Statement*, 1990 and 1994.

U.S. Department of Transportation, FHWA. "Non-discrimination, Environmental Justice, and Community Impact Assessment in Planning and Project Development," memorandum to FHWA Field Offices, July 1995.

U.S. Department of Transportation, FHWA and FTA. *Public Involvement Techniques for Transportation Decisionmaking*. Summer 1996.

U.S. Department of Transportation, FHWA. *Social Impact Assessment: A Sourcebook for Highway Planners, Vol III: Inventory of Highway Related Social Impacts*. Final Report, June 1982.

U.S. Department of Transportation, FHWA and FTA. *Innovations in Public Involvement for Transportation Planning*. January 1994.

